

TECHNICAL PERSONNEL ARE INDISPENSABLE FOR CHINA'S INDUSTRIALIZATION

December 25, 1949

This Conference on Iron and Steel Production has been a great success. It has decided that our country's iron and steel industry should be concentrated in the Northeast, and it has set the 1950 target for production of pig iron at 880,000 tons. This is a major event. Although the Soviet experts have suggested a higher target, I think the task set by the conference is already a heavy one. We should work to fulfil and overfulfil this goal, and we hope all our comrades will make every effort in this regard.

Of course, there is no lack of difficulties. For instance, it will be hard to concentrate our limited number of technical personnel in a few places and to mobilize experts to go to northeast China for new economic work. Our problems in this connection arise from the following three factors.

First, the authorities of North, Central and East China and other regions are reluctant to release the necessary personnel. This problem must be solved at the present conference. At a time when our country is beset with financial difficulties, the decision to build an iron and steel industry in the Northeast is one of national importance. Selfish departmentalism is detrimental to the overall interest and is therefore intolerable.

Second, it is questionable whether the authorities in the Northeast will be able to make proper arrangements for the personnel sent there from other regions. As far as I know, China has no more than three million industrial workers and only about three hundred thousand technical and managerial personnel. All of the latter are willing to work, and with correct leadership they are capable of accomplishing a great deal. As a "national treasure", they are indispensable for the country's industrialization, and we should make the most of their knowledge. In the past couple of years there have been notable changes in the ideology and political awareness of our technical personnel,

Excerpt from a speech summing up the National Conference on Iron and Steel Production.⁵⁰

so we should no longer look upon them in the old light. Comrades in a national inspection group that recently returned from a tour of northeast China told me that the technical personnel there are not valued as their counterparts are in Shanghai. This problem merits our attention. We should trust the technical personnel and ensure that their material needs are met, so as to free them from family worries.

Third, there is the question of what approach the technical personnel themselves should take towards their remuneration and position. So far as remuneration goes, they aren't much better off where they are now, since there's only a difference of 50 to 100 kg. of millet⁴² between areas north of the Great Wall and those south of it. As for position, I think there are two possible approaches a person can take. One is to go to the Northeast not to become a factory director immediately but to help the people there to accomplish something. It will not be too late to manage a factory after you have proved your professional competence. The other approach is to try to push others aside so that you can become the director the day you arrive. If you belittle other people's performance but are not sure how to do any better yourself, you may find yourself in an awkward position, and it would be very embarrassing to have to resign. If it were I, I would rather take the first approach.

To build up our country and raise the living standards of the masses, it is necessary to develop industry, which in turn calls for technology. It's good to have mettle and determination, but they alone are not enough. We also need to have scientific and technical knowledge and to carry on China's fine cultural traditions. We should rely mainly on ourselves and work together to make the best of what we have. We hope that, after this conference, large numbers of technical personnel will cheerfully go to work in the Northeast.

In the coming months our work will be unified throughout the country. Factors that once made unification difficult have now disappeared, and objective reality dictates that we exercise centralized leadership. Most of the liberated areas have now been joined together to form a contiguous whole. Railway traffic is being restored. Except for the Northeast, currency has been unified, and progress has been made in other fields too. When the War of Liberation is over and monetary value has been stabilized, the northeast currency¹⁹ will soon be replaced by RMB. Nationwide monetary unification is only a matter of time, and it is coming fast. The Central Financial and Economic Commission⁷ will hold a series of conferences to make the necessary arrangements, and all our comrades are expected to work towards this goal.